

# Toughen Up, Lithuanians Tell Bush

There were hints over the weekend of a possible compromise in the standoff between Lithuania and Moscow along lines suggested last week by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and French President Francois Mitterrand. In an interview with the Wall Street Journal's Edward McFadden conducted before these developments, Gediminas Vagnorius, chairman of the committee on economy of Lithuania's parliament, discussed the standoff. Egidijus Klumbys, vice-chairman of the foreign affairs committee, accompanied Mr. Vagnorius. The two were in Brussels Saturday on a mission to win support in Europe for Lithuanian independence. Andre Miknevičius translated. An edited transcript:

WSJ: What is the situation in your country?

Due to the complete blockade by the Soviet Union many people have now stopped working. Because oil, gas and goods no longer arrive, the factories cannot work normally. We have had to lay off doctors. They have nothing to heal their patients with. We don't have basic drugs, even oxygen for surgery is in short supply. There are no longer goods in the shops.

WSJ: What are the prospects for a peaceful negotiation?

Up to now, Lithuania has been doing everything it can to start negotiations and Moscow has refused. We are open to negotiating everything except the restoration of independence. That would be like selling our mothers and our fathers.

WSJ: From the Lithuanian point of view, what would be the minimum acceptable outcome from negotiations?

The legal recognition of the March 11 declaration of independence. All the rest is negotiable in satisfying the vital interests of Lithuania, but also satisfying what Mr. Gorbachev considers to be the Soviet Union's vital interests.

WSJ: Do you think that you will gain your freedom peacefully?

Of course. We have no other way. We have no army, no armored force. Lithuania will negotiate everything peacefully. I was recently in the southern Caucasus republics and there the situation is much more critical than in the Baltic states because there they are of a mind to use force and they have the means to do it. They have the natural boundaries, and they have the temperament.

WSJ: Before you declared independence did you believe you would get greater Western support than you have received?

Almost all Western countries did not

recognize the annexation of the Baltic states to the Soviet Union. We were convinced the Western states would be consistent with their former position and would support an announcement of restoration of our independence. Due to the very weak position taken by the West, Moscow is feeling much more free to do whatever it wants not only in Lithuania but in all the republics and especially in the treatment of other democratic forces in the Soviet Union. As you know the Soviet economic

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situation is catastrophic. They are bankrupt. The position of the West will influence the internal political actions which Moscow will take.

WSJ: What would be appropriate measures for the West to take?

The West must accept the legality of the independence act. I don't think the West understands the internal politics of the Soviet Union. The West thinks that silence strengthens the democratic forces but the exact opposite is true. If the silence continues, you have to expect events very similar to what happened in Romania. The difference is that you will have assured the victory of the conservative forces in this civil war.

It is a complete mistake for the Bush administration to think that Mr. Gorbachev is representative of democratic forces. Inside the Soviet Union, the democratic forces think exactly the opposite. A month ago, Mr. Gorbachev appointed a special board of advisers—the most powerful body in the Soviet Union—and he picked nothing but conservatives. There is not one democratic member on the board. From what we have seen, it is clear that Mr. Gorbachev is legalizing his dictatorship.

WSJ: If the West wanted to send aid in the form of fuel, medicine, etc. does Lithuania control a port of entry?

Nowadays, all the borders on sea and land are controlled by not only the Red Army, but also the KGB army. They are confiscating all the goods coming from other countries. Moscow confiscated all the currencies that belong to the Lithuanian factories and enterprises. This is due to the centralized banking system of the Soviet economy. There are two things that the Soviet Union will now openly dare to do:

First, armed intervention—the use of force; second, confiscating all the goods and humanitarian help that reaches the borders from the West. We hope that this will become an international scandal.

WSJ: Russia is withholding fuel from Lithuania, and Lithuania food from parts of Russia. Which side will feel the most pressure?

We don't need anything from the Soviet Union. We just wish that they would stop the blockade. Before World War II the

peaceful means available. We are also here to try to get very urgent humanitarian aid.

WSJ: Do you really think that the KGB will let this humanitarian aid in after letting nothing else in so far?

We must try. If the KGB confiscates these goods and humanitarian aid, then it will be a shame not only for the Soviet Union but also for all the Western countries. The physicians have no medicine, we especially need the medicine. As soon as we can, we are trying to convert all of the internal production to try to produce some of the goods being held captive by the blockade. I think you should understand that the blockade is not only keeping things out, but there is an internal blockade as well. All the internal traffic, especially on the railways and roads is blocked. If our conversion is to succeed, our first goal is to get petrol. We have some reserves, but not much.

WSJ: And the general public is willing to sacrifice like this? What would happen if two weeks from now, the people said, "Enough. We can't take this any more"?

That is a statement that will only be issued by the Lithuanian delegation. His delegation over a thousand people. The day before we received a phone call saying, "Please support everything." We are ready to do anything. Please take into account that this started on March 11. This is a struggle of 51 years. And as deep as the pressure is from Moscow, so is the determination of the Lithuanian people.

WSJ: We have received reports that officials from Lithuania's government are being sent out of the country to form an international network, in case there is a serious crackdown and the movement is struck down.

Powers have been given to some of the former ambassadors who were in place before World War II to continue to do everything that is suitable to regain independence for Lithuania. But new leaders are involved. We have a government-in-exile set up in case Lithuania is annexed a second time or the West recognizes the first annexation, which in fact is what they are doing right now.

WSJ: If you could speak directly to Mr. Bush and the American people, what would you say?

Mr. Bush, the situation in your Eastern nations is in your hands. Please be careful.